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RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001670

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: GENERAL STAFF SPEAKS OUT -- AGAIN -- ON PKK TERROR
AND MILITARY READINESS

REF: A. ANKARA 1651

[B](#). ANKARA 1634

[C](#). ANKARA 1449

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Senior commanders briefing journalists at a commando training area in western Turkey June 26 rejected press allegations that Turkish troops are not properly trained to fight PKK terrorists, reiterated the military's belief that a cross-border operation (CBO) into northern Iraq is necessary, and challenged the government to provide a political goal for a military operation in Iraq. In response, FM Gul told the press June 27 that all options are on the table, the government and military are in constant contact, and he could not rule out at CBO prior to July 22 elections. Both the commanders and Gul expressed dissatisfaction with U.S. and European support for Turkey against the PKK. Comment. Pre-election maneuvering between AKP and TGS will continue and intensify in the days ahead, and both sides will continue to poke at the lack of USG action against the PKK. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Responding to press accusations that Turkish soldiers sent to fight PKK terrorists in southeastern Turkey are suffering inordinate casualties due to lack of experience and poor training, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) invited selected journalists to a commando training center at Egirdir, in western Turkey on June 26. Following demonstrations of commando combat proficiency training, both CHOD Buyukanit as well as Land Forces commander Basbug briefed journalists. Buyukanit reported that he had briefed government officials on several occasions during the past days (ref a), noting that Prime Minister Erdogan had come to TGS headquarters on June 21. Buyukanit reminded journalists of his April 12 statement that a CBO into northern Iraq would be necessary and useful, although subject to parliamentary approval. He stated that a CBO would harm the PKK, while acknowledging that it would not by itself defeat the terrorists. He suggested that the objectives of a CBO might be broader than simply attacking PKK bases in northern Iraq and challenged the civilian authorities to articulate the political goal for a military operation. He said that he was not satisfied with U.S. and European support for Turkey's fight against the PKK.

13. (U) Land Forces commander Basbug told the press that there are an estimated at 5750 PKK terrorists, with 1800-1900 inside Turkey and 3350-3750 abroad, of which some 3000 are in northern Iraq. PKK operatives in Turkey are concentrated in Siirt and Sirnak provinces. Basbug said that PKK attacks had increased 65 percent compared to 2006, with 64 Turkish military fatalities and 220 PKK terrorists "rendered ineffective" to date. Referring to a TGS website appeal for Turkish citizens to demonstrate their anger at PKK terrorism (ref c), he cautioned that such public demonstrations should be non-violent, non-partisan, and conducted within a democratic framework.

14. (U) Basbug reported that eight additional battalions have been deployed to the southeast in 2006 and 2007. Addressing media allegations that unprepared conscripts are being sent to fight in the southeast, Basbug admitted that losses will continue but that six of the commando brigades will consist only of professional soldiers and senior NCOs by May 2008.

15. (U) In reply to the comments by Buyukanit and Basbug, FM Gul told the press that all options remain on the table for Turkey to deal with PKK terrorism. He stated that he could not rule out a CBO before July 22 parliamentary elections. He stressed that the government and military had been in constant contact over the preceding weeks about the PKK situation and northern Iraq, and were in agreement on their approach to the problem. He stated that the U.S., as the "occupation force" in Iraq, must exercise its responsibility to provide security in all of Iraq, not just Baghdad and Basra. If this is not done, Gul suggested, the U.S. should not oppose Turkey taking measures against terrorists in northern Iraq.

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